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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

JUNE 2005

HANCOCK COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

JUNE HAPPENINGS

Since there are five Thursdays in the month of June, the board decided to hold the luncheon on Thursday, June 23. It will of course be at the Kate Lobrano House at 108 Cue Street. At 12 noon. This month's guest speaker will be Dr. Andy Martinolich, who will speak on the history of the hospital system in Hancock County. Please call 467-4090 for reservations as the seating will be limited. Cost of the lunch is \$7.00 payable at the door.

The board is sorry to announce the resignation of board member Sheila Cork. Sheila accepted a job as Head Librarian at NOMA in New Orleans. We will miss her. Ms Patty Furr will fill the vacancy on the board. Following is a statement from Sheila to all of her friends she is leaving behind.

Hi, Everyone, just to let you all know that I will be leaving Hancock County Library System to become the Librarian at the New Orleans Museum of Art, I will be starting there on the 13th of June. Although this is a wonderful opportunity, I will miss you all very much. It is great to see you when you came into the library and at the Society's luncheons. If you are in New Orleans please call in at the museum and ask to speak to me. I will enjoy showing you the library and catching up on all the news with you.

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Pass Marion
Light House off
Pass Christian,
Mississippi

EVOLUTION OF THE LIGHTHOUSE TOWER

By Dale St. Amant

Over the centuries the evolution of the lighthouse has taken many shapes and forms influenced by the advances in technology along the way.

Twelve lighthouses were built in the United States before the constitution transferred lighthouse control from the states to the federal government. No two were constructed from the same set of plans and all were built from local materials.

These early lighthouses were constructed of wood or stone. Those built of wood were eventually destroyed by fire. The stone towers were built by piling one stone on top of another held together by mortar. Since the walls contained no additional support, such as reinforcing rods, they had to be tapered as they rose. This enabled the base to support the ever-increasing weight and prevented the tower from becoming unstable. Therefore, the higher the light, the thicker the base.

Lighthouses built be-



THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Editor - Dale St.Amant
 Publisher - Mike Cuevas
 Published monthly by the

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108 Cue Street or P.O. Box 312
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MISSION STATEMENT

To preserve the general and architectural history of Hancock County and to preserve the Kate Lobrano House and collections therein; to research and interpret life in Hancock County ; and to encourage an appreciation of and interest in historical preservation.

Paul Lacoste

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tween 1789 and 1820 deserve close attention. In 1789 the federal government took over from the states, and in 1820, the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury became responsible for light houses. At first, President George Washington took an active interest in lighthouses, but it was not too long before the President had to delegate this responsibility. First, the responsibility passed to the Commissioner of the Revenue, and then it went to the Secretary of the Treasury. For quite sometime, Albert Gallatin, the Secretary from 1801 until 1814, played an active role in lighthouse administration. Hardly a year or two went by when one or two new lighthouses were not appropriated.

Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, Samuel S. Pleasonton, directed the Lighthouse Service from 1820-1852. Having little or no experience in navigation or lighthouses, he allowed the service to fall far behind European lighthouse service.

During the later days of this era, cut stones were used for the first time. This permitted the construction of taller and stronger towers because the weight could be more evenly distributed. A few of these survive today.

THE FIFTH AUDITOR

The Fifth Auditor of the treasury was a financial zealot who proudly returned funds appropriated for the construction and repair of lighthouses to the Treasury unspent. He was a lighthouse novice when assigned the task and did little to improve his knowledge of lighthouse technology during his 32-year tenure. This period, which began in 1820, might well be labeled the era of "the lowest bidder." The light-

houses built during this period were inferior structures constantly in need of replacement. Furthermore, the lighting system used was inferior to, but less expensive than, those employed in Europe.

In 1852, a special committee appointed by Congress conducted an investigation into the lighthouse system and concluded that it was grossly inadequate. A new era in American lighthouse construction was ushered in and the next few decades were the most dynamic period in American lighthouse construction .

Although more attention has been given to technology's influence upon lighthouse construction during this period, the administrative change from the Fifth Auditor to the newly-created Lighthouse Board was more influential. The advances in technology had already taken place, they only needed to be applied to lighthouse construction.

SCREW-PILE LIGHTHOUSE

The protected, screw-pile lighthouse was introduced into the United States in 1850 during the closing days of the Fifth Auditor's reign. A protected, screw-pile lighthouse was typically a lightweight, wooden tower on iron stilts, the legs of which are tipped with cork-screw-like flanges. These legs are turned into the soft ground of protected waters, such as bays and sounds. This new type of lighthouse was dependent upon the development of wrought-iron columns for the legs and cast-iron for the screw-like flanges. This technology permitted the construction of lighthouses on sites too soft to support the weight of a

heavy tower. The first screw-pile lighthouse had been built earlier in England. This technology was introduced in America at Brandywine Shoals in the Delaware Bay in 1850. Within a few decades, perhaps as many as 100 protected screw-pile lighthouses were built throughout the United States, principally in the Carolina sounds and Chesapeake Bay. But they could also be found in the Gulf of Mexico.

This type of structure was particularly suited to slow moving, shallow water. The principal enemies of this kind of structure were fast-flowing water, ice, and fire. The screw-pile lighthouse design for exposed sites evolved two years after its less complex cousin built for protected waters. The screw-pile lighthouse in the bays and sounds did not need to project their lights more than a few miles, so the height of the lens was not a major concern. In 1858 this type of light was built in the Gulf of Mexico at Ship Shoal, Louisiana.

Cast iron revolutionized the construction of lighthouses in Northern bays and sounds because it significantly reduced the cost of building a lighthouse foundation in the water to a fraction of what it had been. The screw-pile structure had revolutionized lighthouses in the bays and sounds of southern waters; however, this technology was not applicable in northern waters because of its vulnerability to swift currents and ice.

A hollow cast-iron shell could be sunk to the seabed in water up to 30 feet and filled with sand, rock, or concrete. Cast iron was selected because of its ability to resist corrosion in salt water. A lighthouse, typically of cast iron, was placed on top of the caisson although other ma-

terials were also used for the tower. By the 1870's these caisson lighthouses increased in number through the northern waters of the nation. Approximately 50 caisson lighthouses were built.

Aluminum was introduced into lighthouse construction following World War II, primarily in the lantern room area. The Charleston tower completed in 1960 was the first structure where aluminum was extensively used in the construction of the tower. The skeleton of this 140-foot tower is made of high-strength steel, and the panels are aluminum. The tower is designed to withstand winds up to 160 mph, and it is the only lighthouse with an elevator.

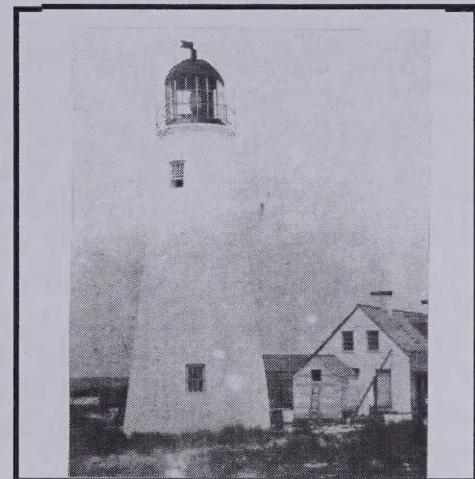
"Lighthouses were our traffic lights of the sea between New Orleans and Mobile. The few that are left are historical relics."

CHARLES SULLIVAN

LOCAL LIGHTHOUSE HISTORY

Ship Island Lighthouse

The original French name Isle des Vasseaux is evidence that early explorers considered this spot a fine anchorage for the largest craft. While the Cat and Chandeleur Islands also served colonial mariners with harbors, Ship Island became a small colony in itself. Inbound ships loaded with immigrants, slaves, and manufactured supplies landed there for the Louisiana colony. They loaded sugar, indigo, timbers, and other products for the European and Caribbean



The first keeper at Ship Island Lighthouse Edward Havens, died less than two years on duty and was succeeded by his widow, Mary who served three years.

markets.

In the 1840's Mississippians lobbied for a naval facility at the island, extolling its advantages over Pensacola. Requests to fortify the island also failed repeatedly as Army engineers argued that an enemy could choose from too many other passes to invade Mississippi Sound.

Congress ordered a formal survey of the barrier islands. Representative Jefferson Davis published an address in 1846 claiming that the U.S. Coast Survey would soon confirm his opinion that Ship Island should be the state's first naval and military complex and that "further it will lead to the speedy establishment to the necessary light along the Coast and upon its adjacent islands."

After Davis was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1847, the Light-House Board received \$12,000 for a light at Ship Island as well as funds for towers at Chandeleur Island and Biloxi.

Though all of Ship Island had been declared a federal reservation in 1847, a Spanish land grant delayed the start of the light-

house construction until 1853. A 45-foot brick tower was completed by November 1853 and was lit on Christmas day. The tower originally held old-style reflectors, which were replaced in 1856 with a fourth-order (a classification of lighthouses and lighthouse lenses with the First Order being the largest and the Sixth Order being the smallest light.) Fresnel lens held 51 feet above the Gulf.

A Fresnel lens was any lens that followed the 1822 design of French physicist Augustine Fresnel utilizing a system of prisms and a convex belt of glass at the focal plane to focus light rays into a single, horizontal beam. A "Bulls eye" lens of clear or colored glass was often placed along the belt to show a flashing light. The Fresnel design is used in today's lens unchanged for 150 years.

FORT TWIGGS

Ship Island was destined to become the site of a major Army installation. The incomplete works near the light station were seized by a small Confederate force and named Fort Twiggs on January 13, 1861, four days after Mississippi declared its sovereignty. The light went out on July 7. At the same time the occupying force was increased to 140 troops backed by eight heavy cannon. Commander Melancton Smith, commanding *USS Massachusetts*, reported that on September 15, 1861, Confederate soldiers "destroyed the lighthouse by burning the interior and breaking the plate glass of the lantern," adding

that their hasty departure was "undoubtedly accelerated by a message sent from my rifled gun." Actually, most of the enemy had already evacuated, warned of the enemy's approach by a lookout in the lighthouse. Confederate soldiers under Lieutenant John G. Devereux stayed behind to destroy everything of use to the Yankees. They packed the base of the lighthouse with scrap lumber and tossed in a firebrand, "having previously taken down the Fresnel [sic] lamp, which was carefully boxed up and brought away." (The lens is currently on display at the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum in Biloxi, Mississippi.)

Nearly 2,000 Union soldiers landed in December 1861 to establish Fort Massachusetts, nick-named after the Union flagship. The island became a temporary headquarters for the Gulf Blockading Squadron, the harbor filled with boats. This hub of activity required the services of a light, and the lighthouse engineer from New Orleans installed a captured fourth-order lens on the evening of November 14, 1862, tended by temporary keeper John C. Goodwin.

In 1886 every building at the station was condemned as unsafe. A new square, open-frame lighthouse tower of 12-by-12 hand-hewn timbers replaced the old brick tower and was lit with the old lens on September 26 of that year. By 1901 the brick tower had fallen, and the rubble was formed into a quoin to curb erosion. More than 1,000 tons of rock were spread around the station in

1906 to keep sand from blowing away.

In later years the station became part of the Ship Island tourist attraction. More than 8,000 sightseers visited the lighthouse in 1938 alone, and the numbers grew steadily after World War II. In June 1972 campers accidentally set the wood tower afire, and it burned to the ground. A slender steel skeleton erected in 1971 was left standing.

SHIP ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE TODAY

On October 9, 1998, all four Gulfport Seabee battalions began rebuilding the lighthouse with the felling of a 25-year old pine.

At the official dedication of the Ship Island Lighthouse, Hancock Bank President and CEO George Schloegel said, "The beautiful rebuilding of the lighthouse simply could not have been accomplished without the Seabees... we're honored that they could take on this construction project for the Friends of the Gulf Island National Seashore."

The lighthouse is located on West Ship Island, which is about 12 miles offshore from Gulfport, Mississippi. The island is part of the Gulf Island National Seashore Parks system and administered by the National Parks Service. Also located on the island is historic Fort Massachusetts. There are ferries to the island, leaving Gulfport, Mississippi, operated by Ship Island Excursions.

BILOXI LIGHTHOUSE

In 1848 the town of Biloxi received one of three lighthouses sponsored by Representative Jefferson Davis. The Fifth Auditor began an experiment that would revolutionize lighthouse building in America. He said, "I intend to put a Cast Iron Light house at Biloxi...and this will prove the utility which they may be of." The masonry was added for strength, rust-proofing, and insulation from the subtropical heat.

Originally, the tower was to have been placed on Deer Island to mark the harbor in Biloxi Bay. But it was finally placed inside the village of Biloxi as a guide for the increasing coastal traffic of mail boats, as well as passenger steamers visiting Mississippi Sound's spas.

Marcellus J. Howard became the first keeper on April 4, 1848. The tower was completed by May 11, 1848. With the exception of Howard's six-year tenure and a one-year stint by Perry Younghans, the Biloxi lighthouse was tended by a woman for its first 81 years. The first was the widow Mary J. Reynolds, who also tended a large flock of orphaned relatives. She kept the light from as early as January 1854 to June 18, 1861, when Mayor James Fewell, head of the Biloxi Home Guards, ordered the light extinguished and the lens stored in the city. Reynolds tended the Pass Christian Lighthouse after the Civil War. When keeper Perry Younghans died on November 6, 1867, his widow Maria was appointed in his place. She tended the light 51 years, retiring with an immaculate record and earning a

commendation for courage as the "plucky woman in charge of the light" in the hurricane of 1893. Her daughter Miranda took over in 1918 and retired in 1929 at the age of 76.

During the Civil War, the Home Guards manned a battery of four cannons at the lighthouse. Union gunboats taunted them but were unable to draw fire. They did not know that only one gun was in working order.

Post-war renovation took only a month. In the 1860 storm a portion of the retaining wall had collapsed, allowing seas to undermine the foundation. The U.S. lighthouse engineer applied an experimental remedy. His crew excavated under the opposite side of the foundation and the tower rocked back into position under its own weight.

In 1867 Biloxi's white tower was one of several iron lighthouses to be smeared with sticky, black coal tar as a rust retardant. This color started a myth that the tower was painted black to mourn Abraham Lincoln's death.. *Lighthouses & Lightships of the Northern Gulf of Mexico*, states, "The tower was probably not painted black to mourn the death of Abraham Lincoln....The tar was applied in 1867, two years after Lincoln's death, and the Lighthouse is situated within sight of Beauvoir, home of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, an improbable location for a Lincoln Memorial."

The tower was repainted white because the black color blended with the dark pine woods in the background, making it dif-

ficult to distinguish as a day mark.

The Gulf Coast Times states, "The fuel for the light was common lard oil, which often froze in cold weather. The lighthouse keeper had to climb to the top twice each cold night to change the lamps."

The tower is now owned by the City of Biloxi and operated as a private aid of navigation. Access to the tower grounds is quite easy since it is located in the median between the east and west lanes of U.S. 90.

ST. JOSEPH'S ISLAND

St. Joseph's Island, south of Bay St. Louis, between St. Joseph's Point and Grand Island, received a lighthouse in 1859. By the time work was completed on the St. Joseph's lighthouse, workmen found that the structure had settled several feet into the mud and the island was rapidly washing away.

Before this problem could be taken care of the Civil War began. Finally, it was lighted for the first time in 1865. There were many problems: its continuous sinking into the soft mud; the "sea worms" eating the timber foundations; and probably the most destructive one, the sea's continuing to wash the island away until 1878 when the station was left in water.

The lighthouse was discontinued on September 1, 1889, the dwelling left as a day mark.

Sources: http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/h_lighthouses.html
Lighthouses & Lightships of the Northern Gulf of Mexico; Department of Transportation, United States Coast Guard.

Hancock County Historical Society Vertical Files

A NEW PARTNERSHIP IN PROGRESS

The Hancock County Historical Society board unanimously agreed to enter into a partnership between the Pearl River Community College Museum in cooperation with PRCC Hancock Center. We are excited about future possibilities.

After meeting with Dr. Gaynell Landner and Mr. Ronn Hague, Mr. Charles Gray, Executive Director of the Society states that future plans include a press conference with college officials, and a trip to the PRC campus to visit the new Museum.

Proposed Objectives for the Partnership:

To promote both organizations;

To develop a system of communication that enhances

sharing of ideas, programs, and historical ideas; To promote learning in the public and private schools in Hancock and Pearl River counties by offering coordinated visits to both organizations' museums;

To promote an interest in the local histories of Hancock County and Pearl River Community College alumni to understand the heritage of both areas;

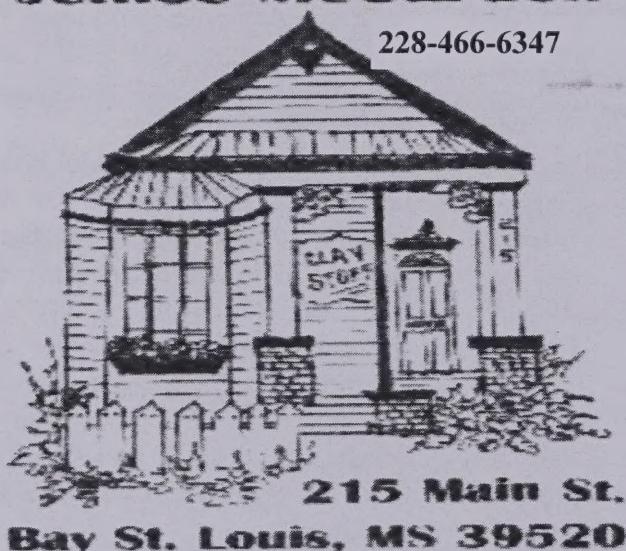
To encourage adult learning by producing programs that revitalize an interest in local history;

To promote a spirit of cooperation between the Hancock County Historical Society's members and Pearl river Community College Museum patrons;

To establish an oral history program.

Clay Creations Jenise McCardell

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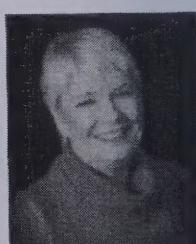
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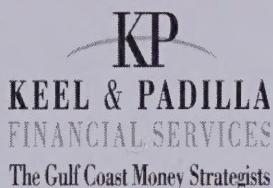
"As a Senior, I'm more concerned about the return **OF** my principal rather than return **ON** my principal.." Will Rogers



Micah Keel Robert Padilla

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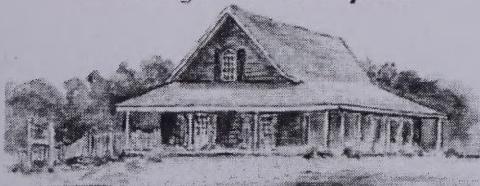
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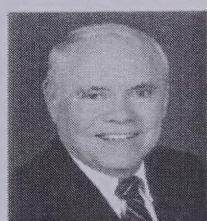
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